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MR. MORLEY'S LIFE OF GLADSTONE.—I.*

BY GOLDWIN SMITH, D.C.L.

SINCE the appearance of the first volumes of Macaulay's History there has not been such an event in the publishing world as the appearance of a Life of Gladstone by Mr. Morley. Nor has public expectation been disappointed.

Though I saw a good deal of Gladstone, both in the way of business and socially, I never was nor could have been, like Mr. Morley, his colleague and a partner of his counsels. On the other hand, I lived in the closest intimacy with men who were his associates in public life, and saw him through their eyes.

To me, Gladstone's life is specially interesting as that of a man who was a fearless and powerful upholder of humanity and righteousness in an age in which faith in both was growing weak, and Jingoism, with its lust of war and rapine, was taking possession of the world. The man who, breaking through the restraints of diplomatic prudery, pleaded before Europe with prevailing eloquence the cause of oppressed Italy; who dared, after Majuba Hill, in face of public excitement, to keep the path of justice and honor in dealing with the Transvaal; whose denunciation of the Bulgarian atrocities made the Turkish Assassin tremble on his throne of iniquity; who, if he had lived so long, would surely have striven to save the honor of the country by denouncing the conspiracy against the liberty of the South-African republics; who, if he were now living, would be protesting, not in vain, against the shameful indifference of England to her responsibility for Macedonian horrors: has a more peculiar hold on my veneration and gratitude than the statesman whose achievements and merits, very great as they were, have never seemed to me quite so

* "The Life of William Ewart Gladstone." By John Morley. In three volumes. London and New York: Macmillan, 1903.

great as, in Mr. Morley's admirably executed picture, they appear. Not that I would undervalue Gladstone's statesmanship or its fruits. Wonderful improvements in finance, great administrative reforms, the opening of the Civil Service, the Postal Savings-Bank, the liberation of the newspaper press from the paper duty, the abolition of purchase in the army, the reform of the Universities and of the endowed schools, the disestablishment of the Irish Church, and the commercial treaty with France, make up a mighty harvest of good work; even if we leave the resettlement of the franchise open to question and carry Home Rule to the wrong side of the account. Very striking is the contrast, in this respect, between Gladstone's career and that of his principal rival, who gave his mind little to practical improvement, and almost entirely to the game of party and the struggle for power. Moreover, Gladstone filled the nation with a spirit of common enthusiasm and hopeful effort for the general good, especially for the good of the masses, to which there was nothing corresponding on the part of his rival for power, whose grand game was that of setting two classes, the highest and the lowest, against the third. Gladstone was, in the best sense, a man of the people; and the heart of the people seldom failed to respond to his appeal.

This man was a wonderful being, physically and mentally, the mental part being well sustained by the physical. His form bespoke the nervous energy with which it was surcharged. His eye was extremely bright, though in the rest of the face there was no beauty or even refinement. His physical and mental force was such that he could speak for four or five hours at a stretch, and with vigor and freshness so sustained that George Venables, an extremely fastidious and not over-friendly critic, after hearing him for four hours, and on a financial subject, wished that he could go on for four hours more. His powers of work were enormous. He once called me to him to help in settling the details of a University Bill. He told me that he had been up over the Bill very late at night. We worked together from ten in the morning till six in the afternoon, saving an hour and a half which he spent at a Privy Council, leaving me with the Bill. When we parted, he went down to the House, where he spoke at one o'clock the next morning. Besides his mountain of business, he was a voluminous writer on other than political subjects, and did a vast amount of miscellaneous reading. As a proof of his powers of

acquisition, he gained so perfect a mastery of the Italian language as to be able to make a long speech in which Italian criticism, could detect only two mistakes, and those merely uses of a poetical instead of the ordinary word.

Like Pitt, Gladstone was a first-rate sleeper. At the time when he had exposed himself to great obloquy and violent attacks by his secession from the Palmerston Government, in the middle of the Crimean War, one of his intimate friends spoke of him to me as being in so extreme a state of excitement that he hardly liked to go near him. Next day, I had business with him. He went out of the room to fetch a letter, leaving me with Mrs. Gladstone, to whom I said that I feared he must be severely tried by the attacks. She replied that he was, but that he would come home from the most exciting debate and fall at once into sound sleep. A bad night, she said, if ever he had one, upset him. But this was very rare. He chronicles his good and bad nights, showing how thoroughly he felt the necessity of sound sleep. In extreme old age, he could take long walks and fell trees, he conversed with unfailing vivacity, doing a good deal of work at the same time, and seemed to be the last of the party in the evening to wish to go to bed.

The hero was fond of dwelling on his Scotch extraction—in fact, of rather thrusting it in the face of England. His domicile, however, was Liverpool, and his father was a West-Indian proprietor and slave-owner; a circumstance perhaps not wholly without influence on one or two passages of his life. To his Scotch shrewdness and aptitude for business, Eton and Oxford added the highest English culture. Eton in those days would teach him only classics. But there was a good deal of interest in public affairs among the boys, many of whom were scions of political houses. There was a lively debating club of which Gladstone was the star. At Oxford, he added mathematics to classics, taking the highest honors in both. There, also, he was the star of the debating club. It was a fine time for budding debaters, being the epoch of the great struggle about the Reform Bill. Gladstone led vehemently and gloriously on the Tory side. The result was that his fellow collegian, Lord Lincoln, introduced him as a most promising recruit to his father the old Duke of Newcastle, the highest of Tories, and Gladstone was elected to Parliament for Newark, a borough under the Duke's influence. I have

read the correspondence, and there is nothing in it derogatory to the young man's independence.

Oxford was the heart of clericism as well as Toryism, and the advance of Liberalism threatened the Anglican State Church, as well as the oligarchy of rotten boroughs. The Tractarian movement of sacerdotal reaction was already on foot. Gladstone imbibed the ecclesiastical as well as the political spirit of the place, and formed a friendship, which proved lasting, with the authors of the ecclesiastical reaction. He published a defence of the Anglican State Church, which, as we know, was terribly cut up by Macaulay. The Reviewer, however, ends with a defence of religious establishments really weaker than anything in Gladstone. The State, according to Macaulay, though religion is not its proper business, has some time and energy to spare which it may usefully devote to the regulation of religion.

Gladstone cast off by degrees his extreme Establishmentarianism. He came at last to disestablishing the Church in Ireland and pledging himself to disestablishment in Wales. But he remained firmly attached to the Anglican Church, encircled by High Church friends, who were really nearer to his heart than anybody else, deeply, even passionately interested in all their questions, and an assiduous writer on their side. He was suspected of being a Papist. A Papist he certainly was not. No one could be more opposed to Papal usurpation. His special sympathy was with anti-Papal and anti-Infallibilist Catholics, such as Döllinger and Lord Acton. His religious faith was simple and profound; so simple that he continued in this sceptical age to believe in the plenary inspiration of the Bible, and in the Mosaic account of the Creation. He retained unshaken faith in Providence and in the efficacy of prayer. This in his meditations constantly and clearly appears. At the same time, he grew tolerant of free inquiry as a conscientious quest of truth. Many non-conformists, the leaders especially, notwithstanding his Anglicanism and his suspected leanings to Rome, were drawn to him on broad grounds of religious sympathy and lent him their political support. Lord Salisbury called him "a great Christian." He could not have been more truly described. He had thought of taking Holy Orders. From this he had been happily deterred, but he seems to have been fond of officiating in a semiclerical way by reading the lessons in Hawarden Church.

Gladstone's zeal in the service of his nation and humanity, his loyalty to right and hatred of tyranny and injustice, and his conscientious industry, were sustained by spiritual influences, and Christianity has a right to appeal to his character in support, not of its dogmas, but of its principles.

The first step in emancipation from bondage to the State Church theory was curious and characteristic. Peel, in whose Government Gladstone then was, proposed an increase of the grant to Maynooth. Gladstone paid a tribute to the principle of the "Church in its Relation to the State" by resigning his office. Then, on the ground that the other principle had prevailed, he voted for the grant and went back into the Government. It is thus possible to see how the idea of a certain tortuosity became connected with his career. Bitter enemies even accused him of duplicity. He had a habit, of which his biographer seems aware, of making his words open to a double construction, the consequence, perhaps, of consciousness that his mind was moving and that his position might be changed. He had also a dislike of owning change, and a habit of setting his retroactive imagination at work to prove that there was no inconsistency, which had a bad effect, especially in such a case as his sudden coalition with Parnell.

The value of the recruit was at once recognized and the door of office was presently opened to him by Peel, who was always on the look-out for youthful promise and set himself, perhaps more than any other Prime Minister ever did, to train up a succession of statesmen for the country. Though himself the least eccentric of mankind, Peel showed in more than one case that he could overlook a touch of eccentricity where there was real merit and genuine work. Set, as Vice-President of the Board of Trade, to deal with a subject entirely new to him, Gladstone at once justified Peel's confidence and discernment. Perhaps the office had been chosen for him as one in which his eccentricity had no play. He served Peel admirably well and was perfectly true to his chief. But, from things that I have heard him say, I rather doubt whether he greatly loved Peel. Peel detested the Tractarians; the Tractarians hated Peel; and some of the Tractarians were nearest of all men to Gladstone's heart.

Peel's Government having been overthrown on the question of the Corn Laws by what the Duke of Wellington, with military

directness, called a "blackguard combination" of Tory Protectionists, Whigs, Radicals, and Irish Nationalists, the whole under Semitic influence, its chief, for the short remainder of his life, held himself aloof from the party fray, encouraging no new combination, and content with watching over the safety of his great fiscal reform; though, as Greville says, had the Premiership been put to the vote, Peel would have been elected by an overwhelming majority. His personal following, Peelites as they were called, Graham, Gladstone, Lincoln, Cardwell, Sydney Herbert, and the rest, remained suspended between the two great parties. When Disraeli had thrown over protection, as he meant from the beginning to do, the only barrier of principle between the Peelites and the Conservatives was removed. Repeated overtures were made by the Conservative leader, Lord Derby, to Gladstone, whose immense value as a financier was well established, and the common opinion was that Gladstone would have accepted had Disraeli not been in the way. But Disraeli, though he offered to waive his claims, was in the way, and the result was that the Peelites, Gladstone at their head, coalesced with the Whigs and helped to form the coalition Government of Lord Aberdeen.

Once launched in any career, Gladstone was sure to imbibe the full spirit of the movement and lead the way. His Liberalism presently outstripped that of the Whigs. As the most conspicuous seceder from the Tory camp, he became the special object of antipathy to the Carlton Club, which was fond of speaking of him as insane. "I am much better off for a leader than you are," said a member of the Carlton to a member of the Reform Club; "my leader is only an unscrupulous intriguer; yours is a dangerous lunatic." The story was current that he had bought the whole contents of a toy-shop and ordered them to be sent to his house. This came to me once in so circumstantial a form, that I asked Lady Russell whether she thought it could be true. Her answer was: "I begin to think it is, for I have heard it every session for ten years."

It must be owned that Gladstone was impulsive, and that impulsiveness was the source not only of jibes to his enemies, but sometimes of anxiety to his friends. "What I fear in Gladstone," said Archbishop Tait to me, "is his levity." That he could easily throw off responsibility, I think I have myself seen. But a man on whom so heavy a load of responsibility rests, if he

felt its full weight would be killed by it, and want of conscientiousness is not to be inferred from lightness of heart.

It must have been, indeed it evidently was, much against the grain that the great Minister of peace and economy went into the Crimean War. He seems to have tried to persuade himself that the result, after all, would be the bringing of Turkey under control. More substantial was his resolution, as Chancellor of the Exchequer and holder of the purse, to make the generation which waged the war, as far as possible, pay for it by taxes, not cast the burden upon posterity by loans. Mr. Morley is right in pointing to Lord Stratford de Redcliffe, then unhappily Ambassador at Constantinople, as largely responsible for the war. Besides his hatred of Russia, the ambassador had a personal grudge against the Czar. But conspiring with him were Palmerston, insanely anti-Russian, the father of Jingoism, perhaps not unwilling to supplant the pacific Lord Aberdeen; and the Emperor of the French, who wanted glory to gild his usurped throne and a better social footing in the circle of Royalties, which he gained by publicly embracing the British Queen. In the middle of the war, Gladstone seceded from the Ministry, reconstructed under Palmerston after its fall under Lord Aberdeen; not, I apprehend, because Palmerston failed to oppose Roebuck's motion of inquiry, against which it was useless to contend; but because he was himself thoroughly sick of the war. I happened just then to be with him one morning on business, at the conclusion of which he began to talk to me, or rather to himself, about the situation, saying, in his Homeric way, that if the Trojans would have given back Helen and her treasures—his Homeric phrase for the Vienna terms—the Greeks would have raised the siege of Troy. I had not had the advantage of being at the Greek headquarters; but I could not help seeing in what mood the British people were, and how hopeless it was then to talk to them about reasonable terms of peace. Had Gladstone, instead of bolting in the middle of the war, mustered courage, of which he generally had a superabundance, to oppose it at the outset, he might have incurred obloquy at the moment, but he would have found before long that, to use Salisbury's metaphor reversed, he had laid his money on the right horse. The grass had hardly grown over the graves on the heights of Sebastopol before everybody execrated the war.

After some turns of the political wheel, we find Gladstone

Chancellor of the Exchequer under Palmerston, making the fortune of that Government by his masterly Budgets and splendid expositions of them in the House. If Palmerston was the father of Jingoism, Gladstone was its arch-enemy. Of the two things for which the Prime Minister said he lived—the extinction of slavery, and the military defence of England—Gladstone looked not with special zeal upon the first and very coldly on the second. Palmerston was a commercial Liberal, and he saw the immense value of such a Chancellor of the Exchequer to his Government. But he was believed to have said that, when he was gone, Gladstone would in two years turn their majority of seventy into a minority, and in four be himself in a lunatic asylum. It was known that he wanted as his successor in the leadership, not Gladstone, but Cornewall Lewis. Very pleasant would have been the situation of that worthy and amiable scholar, leading the House with Gladstone on his flank!

One fruit, distinctly Gladstonian, the Palmerston Government bore. That fruit was the commercial treaty with France, negotiated through Cobden, who shared with Bright Palmerston's particular dislike. Cobden even suspected that Palmerston would not have been sorry if the treaty had miscarried, and that he betrayed his feeling in his bearing and language towards France while negotiations were going on. There was nothing in the treaty savoring of retaliation, nor can it be cited by the advocates of that policy. Some Liberals were inclined to demur to it, not because it was inconsistent with free trade, but because it made us to some extent accomplices in a stretch of prerogative on the part of the Emperor of the French, who used the treaty-making power to accomplish, without the authority of his Legislature, a change in the fiscal system of France. Such, at least, is my memory of the transaction.

The objections which some might perhaps take to Gladstone's fiscal system are, that it retains, though it reduces, the income tax, a class tax, and, like the succession duty, dangerously open to class abuse; and that it rests so much upon the consumption of a few important articles. Suppose tobacco, for instance, were to go out of fashion, as some sanitary authorities say it ought, there would be a serious gap in the Budget.

The great master of finance, while he was dealing with it on the largest scale, was conscientiously mindful of the public in-

terest in the most minute details of expenditure. He regarded public money as sacred, and any waste of it, however trifling, as criminal. His biographer has given us amusing instances of his conscientious parsimony in small things. In one case, however, his parsimony was misplaced. He grudged the judges their large salaries. Public money cannot be better expended than in taking the best men from the Bar to the Bench. The expedition of business assured by their command of their courts would in itself be worth the price, apart from the security for justice.

Among other relics of Gladstone's Conservatism, was his clinging for his seat in Parliament to the University of Oxford, in which he was supported by a rather strange and precarious alliance of High Churchmen voting for the High Churchman and Liberals voting for the progressive Liberal; a combination the strain upon which became extreme when Palmerston, in whose Government Gladstone was, made Shaftesbury, the lay leader of the Evangelicals, his Minister for ecclesiastical affairs, and allowed him to go on appointing Low Church Bishops. But the Tories never made a greater mistake than the ejection of Gladstone from his Oxford seat. By sending him from Oxford to Liverpool, they, to use his own phrase, unmuzzled him. It is true, I believe, that, on the day of his rejection, the bible fell out of the hand of the statue of James I. on the gate tower of the Bodleian, an omen of the separation of the Church from the State. The stone being very friable, the fall was not miraculous; although it was curiously apt.

It was a mistake, however, to say that the disestablishment of the Irish Church had been an issue in the Oxford election. I compared notes on that point with my friend, Sir John Mowbray, who had been the chairman of the Tory committee, and agreed with me in saying that the Irish Church was not an issue. Gladstone took up disestablishment for Ireland, which had been long on the Liberal programme, when he had been thrown out of power by Disraeli on the question of extension of the suffrage. He was ambitious, happily for the country; and he wanted to recover the means of doing great things. His admirers need not shrink from that avowal. But he was also sincerely convinced, as well he might be, and as all Liberals were, that the State Church of Ireland was about the most utterly indefensible institution in the world. He framed his measure, expounded it, and carried it

through Parliament, in his usual masterly way; and the Anglican Church in Ireland, it is believed, has felt herself the better for the operation ever since. Gladstone's High Church friends in England forgave him with a sigh. The State Church of Ireland was separate from that of England, and was Low Church and opposed to everything Catholic from local antagonism to the Church of Rome.

Before his junction with the Liberals, Gladstone had deprecated the interference of Parliament with the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge on the ground that they were private foundations with which Parliament had no right to interfere; and when he brought on his Oxford Reform Bill he had to perform one of his feats of retrospective explanation. But, as usual, he did his work well, though he still left more to be done. By his legislation, clerical as his sympathies were, the universities were set free from clericalism, reopened to science, and reunited to the nation. Our Oxford Bill was badly cut up in the Commons, some misguided Liberals playing into the hands of Disraeli, who of course meant mischief. When the Bill in its mutilated state went up to the Lords, it appeared that the Tory leader, Lord Derby, though he felt bound to speak against the Ministerial measure, was not really prepared to throw it out, and that consequently there had not been a whip upon his side. It was then suggested to the Ministers in charge of the Bill that the Commons amendments might be thrown out in the Lords, and the Bill might be sent back in its original state to the Commons, where our friends might by that time be better advised, and the Opposition benches, as it was the end of the session, might be thinned. Russell, then the leader in the Commons, condemned the suggestion as most rash and not unlikely to be the death of the Bill. Gladstone was lying sick of an attack, strange to say, of the chicken-pox. On appeal to him, the signal for battle was at once held out, as I felt sure it would be; and the result was just what we desired.

In connection with this legislative dealing with the endowed colleges of Oxford and Cambridge, the principle may be said to have been practically adopted, though not formally laid down, that, after the lapse of fifty years from the death of a Founder, the Legislature may deal freely with all his regulations, saving the main object of his foundation. The assumption that the wills of Founders were for ever inviolable, in spite of the lapse of ages

and the total change of circumstances, had led, as it must always lead, to a perpetuity of perversion and to the defeat of the main object of the Founders themselves.

He who in his youth had won the favor of the most bigoted of Tory patrons and entrance to public life by his rhetorical opposition to the Reform Bill of 1832, was destined in his maturity to father a Reform Bill at the thought of which the reformers of 1832 would have shuddered. The Reform Bill of 1832 had enfranchised the middle class, but by abolishing the scot-and-lot borough, had deprived the working-class of the little representation which it possessed. Moreover, the legislative preponderance of the landed interest, which had the House of Lords all to itself and a large section of the Commons, was too great for the general good. These were the best reasons for an extension of the suffrage, while the Whig party and its leader Russell, perhaps, as is the way of parties, finding their sails flapping against the mast, wished to raise a little popular wind. It is by the bidding of parties against each other for popularity, largely, that the suffrage has been extended. Russell had for some time been busy with reform, and had more than once moved in that direction, but had been deftly put aside by Palmerston, who, though a Liberal by profession and revolutionary or affecting that character in foreign affairs, was in home politics a Tory at heart, and met general assertions of the right of men to the suffrage as "partakers of our flesh and blood" and presumptively entitled to a place "within the pale of the constitution," with the aphorism that "the one right of every man, woman, and child was to be well governed." It could not be said that the reform agitation, at all events south of Birmingham, was very strong. The large measure of extension brought in by Gladstone was opposed, in some very memorable speeches, by Robert Lowe, a high aristocrat not of birth but of intellect, who made the last stand against democracy and in favor of government by mind. He and his section, dubbed by regular party men "the Cave of Adullam," helped Disraeli to kill the Bill. Disraeli then brought in and carried a Bill, not less radical, of his own, to which the Conservative gentry under the party whip, styled by Disraeli "education," lent a doleful support; while Robert Lowe appealed to their consistency almost with tears, but in vain. Disraeli thus carried off the popularity of the measure, and enabled himself to say that the Tories

were the true friends of the masses. But, besides this, Disraeli looked out of window, which Gladstone's critics, perhaps not wholly without ground for their gibes, said that he did not, and he had perceived and laid to heart the great fact that there were numbers of artisans who cared nothing for Liberalism or progress, and who would be apt under skilful management to vote Tory.

Such a subject as the French war lent transcendent interest to the great speeches of Pitt and Fox. Otherwise, their best efforts are not superior to Gladstone's speech in favor of extension of the suffrage, though Gladstone's style is different from theirs. Gladstone's speeches are not literature. He spoke without notes, and no man can speak literature *ex tempore*. Nor are there any passages of extraordinary brilliancy. For such he had not imagination. But the speeches are masterly expositions of the measure and of the case in its favor, always dignified, measured, and persuasive. The language is invariably good and clear; wonderfully so, considering the absence of notes, though it is somewhat diffuse, having perhaps rather lost freshness by overpractice in debating clubs when the speaker was young. The voice, the manner, the bearing of the orator were supreme, and filled even the most adverse listener with delight.

Gladstone's multifarious reading does not seem to have included a large proportion of history or political philosophy. He has left among his writings nothing of importance in the way of political science, nor does he seem even to have formed any clear conception of the polity which he was seeking to produce. His guiding idea, when once he had broken loose from his early Toryism, was liberty, which he appeared to think would of itself be the parent of all that was good. He had, perhaps, derived something from Russell, whose leading principle it was that the people needed only responsibility to make them act wisely and rightly. He had, apparently, no notion of any system of government other than party, which he seemed to treat as though it had been immemorial and universal, whereas it was born of the struggle for constitutional government against the Stuarts. Even as to the working of the British Constitution, his opinions are not very clear. He professed, and probably felt, the highest respect for the Lords; yet, when they played their constitutional part by throwing out Bills of his of which they did not approve, he denounced them as violators of the Constitution. Did he intend to

vest supreme power absolutely in an assembly elected by manhood, or nearly manhood, suffrage?

For the Crown, Gladstone's reverence went at least as far as to any but believers in political fetichism would seem meet, or as we feel to be perfectly consistent with the dignity of one so eminent and the real head of the State. Yet, it was understood that he was not a favorite at Court, and it is pretty evident that Her Majesty did not eagerly embrace the opportunity of calling on him to form a Government. With all her personal virtues and graces, she was a true grand-daughter of George III., cherishing, as we have been told, apparently on the best authority, ideas of Divine Right, and liking to connect herself not so much with the Hanoverians as with the Stuarts. To her, progressive Liberalism could hardly be very congenial. Moreover, she was a woman, and in a competition in flattery Gladstone would have had no chance with his rival.

It is rather startling to learn from this Life how much there is of interference on the part of irresponsibility with the responsible Government of the Kingdom, and what drafts are made upon the time and energy of one who has the burden of Atlas on his shoulders by the demands of correspondence with the Court. Another thing of which the friends of personal government who have been laboring so hard by pageantry and personal worship to stimulate the monarchical sentiment, may well take note, is the confidential employment of Court Secretaries, like Sir Herbert Taylor under George IV., in communications between the Sovereign and the Minister. They may find, when they have revived the personal power, that it is really wielded, not by the Royal idol, but by some aspiring member or members of the household.

GOLDWIN SMITH.

(To be Continued.)